David Collier
March 2012

Notes on Writing and Editing

These notes are intended to aid students in writing and editing. Clear, articulate writing is a fundamental skill for any student or scholar. It helps in conveying your arguments effectively and in persuading the reader to take them seriously.

1. Organizing a Paper

Standard writing in political science is formulated around the more-or-less traditional idea that a paper has a beginning introduces, a long middle part that develops the full argument, and a conclusion that draws the strands together. As the old saying goes, "You tell 'em what you're gonna tell 'em, then you tell 'em, then you tell 'em what you told 'em."

A more creative modification of this approach is that the conclusion – the "tell 'em what you told 'em" part – should draw out some extensions and implications of the argument. The conclusion might briefly summarize the argument, and then go on to consider what it means for domains beyond that of our discussion. If the paper analyzes a concept, the conclusion might consider the implications for other concepts. If the paper is concerned with a causal question – a "why" question, in other words – the conclusion might discuss the generality of the causal insight, or may further test whether the insight is sound. A conclusion of this kind should be written with great care, but it can be more open-ended and speculative than the rest of the paper.

This form of organization may be usefully contrasted with two standard approaches in journalism: the inverted pyramid style and the feature-story style. In the inverted pyramid style, the elements of the article are presented in order of decreasing importance – quite different from the above approach.[1] Occasionally political science students begin writing in this style, and it is essential to note how different this is from traditional political science writing.

With the feature-story approach, the article typically begins with a "narrative hook," often an anecdote or a depiction of a human situation, and then goes on to elaborate the issue or dilemma posed by the anecdote, typically using a far more narrative approach than is employed in the pyramid style.[2] Though in many ways the feature-article approach is also quite different from

[1] A fundamental element of the pyramid style is the "lead," or opening sentence, which often addresses the "Five Ws," which is also called the "Five Ws and One H." This is the set of questions that elicit the most basic information for a news story: who, what, where, when, why, and how. The idea is that each question must be addressed for the reporting to be complete. The rest of the information in the story is organized in order of decreasing importance – hence, the idea of an inverted pyramid. This way, readers can stop reading at any time and still take away the main points in the story. Also, given the challenges of newspaper articles, front-loading the paper can be helpful in cutting and shortening a number of different points to fit into a small article, while still being coherent.

[2] The feature style is often used with human interest stories or investigative reporting, as opposed to "straight" or breaking news. Articles written in this style open with a "narrative hook," which

political science writing, some variants of a narrative hook may be employed in political science, and narrative – when used with care and precision – is now considered invaluable in some forms of political analysis.

Thinking through these alternative approaches can also help in thinking about the standard approach in political science: in which the introduction anticipates the arguments; the main body of the text – which is the longest part of the paper – makes the arguments; and the conclusion briefly summarizes and may go on to suggest interesting implications and further consequences. Additionally, the conclusion may perhaps point to new ways of evaluating and testing the main arguments in the paper. Hopefully, such a conclusion is written with great care, but it can be more open, speculative, and less grounded in the immediate facts presented in the main body of the paper.

2. Express Your Ideas Clearly

Clear writing is essential. This goal is similar to, but distinct from, the goal of having ideas *worth* expressing clearly. This document is concerned with the first goal. Pursuit of the second goal should be guided by the analytic agendas of the field in which you are working. Note that the suggestions below should not replace any existing norms in your field about how to make a good argument.

2a. Title

The title of any piece of writing should summarize as clearly as possible the topic or focus of the study. A lively title catches readers' attention and alerts them to the issues that will be raised. *Never, never* circulate a draft of a paper or chapter without a title. (Also be sure to include your name, the date, and page numbers.)

Titles are commonly divided into two parts by a colon, with the first part often referring more broadly to the topic or theme of analysis, and the second part relating to specific features of the study. Consider the title of Gregory Luebbert's book, *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe* (Oxford, 1991). The first part identifies the three outcomes on the dependent variable. The second part indicates that the study focuses on social classes, adopts a political perspective in explaining regime outcomes, and indicates the time period and region. Alternatively, consider Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Princeton, 1991; Notre Dame 2002). Here the first part of the title suggests the overall theme, while the second part identifies the region and the three central concerns of the analysis. Note that both of these examples involve long titles. A shorter title with more "punch" is often better, provided it still effectively communicates the primary message.

---

is often an intriguing anecdote used to lure readers in. The story's broader topic – which explains its news value and may address the Five Ws and One H – is often not presented until the third or fourth paragraph. The authors of feature stories sometimes write in the first person, which can reinforce the human element of the story.

2b. Abstract

Many forms of writing require an abstract. Even if an abstract is not required, it can be a useful tool for focusing your writing. The abstract poses this challenge: in 10 to 15 lines, tell the reader what you have to say. This requires leading with your "best sentences," those that really nail down the main points you want to make. Working on the abstract can push you to write concise and effective sentences that can then be moved into the body of the text.

Many writers start the abstract early and revise it while working on the rest of the paper. This can help you nail down and refine your argument as you write. However, if this approach becomes distracting, postpone the abstract until the end of the writing process.

As a general rule, sentences in the abstract also appear in the main body of the paper, and many or most of the sentences will appear in the introduction. However, it is much more rhetorically effective if the first paragraph of the paper does *not* simply repeat the language of the abstract.

2c. Headings

Headings guide the reader through the text. Check your headings by reading them in order, thereby ensuring they constitute a logical sequence and summarize the content of each section in a consistent way. The standard style for headings is to capitalize the first letter of all words, except for articles, conjunctions, and prepositions (provided they are less than five letters long). In writing the first sentence following the heading, you should introduce the idea contained in the heading, trying not to use exactly the same words.

If you use more than one level of heading, be sure to employ the levels in a consistent manner. A common style is to center the first level heading and place the second level flush left, with an extra vertical space before the following paragraph. Headings look less cluttered if there is slightly more space between the prior paragraph and the heading than between the heading and the following paragraph. If you use three levels of headings, it is common to indent the third level into the paragraph, followed by a period. First and second level headings that are *not* indented into a paragraph should *not* be followed by a period. For many purposes, it is better style and looks "cleaner" to make headings bold, and specifically *not* to underline them or put them in italics.

Often, a document of only two or three pages will not have headings. However, in writing certain kinds of short memos or funding proposals, headings, especially compact ones that are indented into the paragraph, can be a great aid in highlighting the main points.

2d. Table of Contents

Maintaining a table of contents that shows all of your headings and subheadings is a valuable aid to establishing good headings. It allows the author to see all of the headings together, facilitates thinking about them as a sequence, and also helps you keep an eye on the relative length of the text that follows each heading. Tables of contents are easy to generate with any standard word-processing software.

2e. Paragraphs

Paragraphs have no standard length. However, if a paragraph starts to run well over half a page, it may be useful to see if it can be divided into two more concise paragraphs. An occasional short, "punchy" paragraph can introduce variety into your writing. A few really good writers can get away with a short, punchy opening paragraph *at the start of* an article or chapter.

2f. Topic Sentences

In standard academic writing, each paragraph should have a clear topic sentence that presents the issue addressed in the paragraph. Self-conscious attention to topic sentences is an excellent means of pushing yourself to write coherent paragraphs. If you read a paragraph carefully and see a shift in the argument partway through, you may want to break the paragraph into two, write a second topic sentence, and then step back and decide if the two paragraphs really say what you want them to say.

2g. Labels, Terms, and Distinctions

Our writing is routinely concerned with presenting observations and arguments about different types, kinds, and distinctions. Communication is greatly improved if we give these observations and arguments vivid names. Use names (i.e., terms) that help the reader to easily remember the types and distinctions. For example, note how hard it is in statistical analysis to remember the distinction between a "Type I" and a "Type II" error. These names are not self-explanatory to most people. If you substitute the names "false positive" and "false negative," the distinction becomes self-explanatory. Other examples of vivid names are: Hirschman's "exit," "voice," and "loyalty," and Krasner's names for the roles of nation-states in the formation of international regimes, "makers," "breakers," and "takers." Finding names as vivid as these can be challenging (rhyming and alliteration help, but do not over do it!), but one can at least try.

When using an acronym for a lengthy or complex name, be sure to introduce the acronym immediately after the first mention of the name to which it refers—e.g., Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). Thereafter, use the acronym consistently throughout the work (although you may wish to use full names for emphasis in your concluding paragraphs).

Another mark of a good writer is the ability to begin the presentation of an argument—including the argument of an entire book or dissertation—with a vivid set of terms that map out the analytic terrain. (Part 3 below discusses a strategy for not burdening your reader with a string of formal definitions, at least in the initial paragraphs.) The writer sticks to those terms throughout the argument. If, halfway through, different terms and distinctions are needed, it may be necessary to go back to the beginning and revise the set of overall labels. The "search" or "find" function in your word processor allows you to quickly locate all instances in which you use a given term.

2h. Glossary

A formal glossary at the back of your prospectus, professional paper, or dissertation helps to clarify your choices about concepts and labels. Alternatively, you may want to construct an informal glossary for your own reference, to help you double check the consistency and coordination of your terms. Finally, being careful and precise about concepts and terms as you write involves having an informal glossary "in your mind." If you are writing in a foreign language,

constructing a glossary of specialized terms that are standard in your field can help avoid recurring mistakes in usage.

3. Check Your Organization and Arguments

As noted above, the importance of headings and topic sentences is invaluable. The following is a helpful procedure for checking your writing for clear organization and argumentation. This process of checking is facilitated by having a table of contents (see above).

3a. Coordinate the Title with the First Paragraph

Read the title and then the opening paragraph. Do they form a good sequence?

3b. Coordinate Title and Headings

Read the title and all the headings to be sure each is clear and self-explanatory, and that they form a logical sequence.

3c. Check the Level of Headings

If you have headings and subheadings, review them carefully to be sure they are consistent and help convey the logic of your argument.

3d. Coordinate Each Heading with the Paragraph that Immediately Follows

Read each heading and the first paragraph following it to be sure that the paragraph effectively introduces the issues presented in the heading.

3e. Sequence of Topic Sentences

Read the topic sentence of every paragraph to ensure that these sentences form a logical sequence.

3f. Check Each Topic Sentence in Relation to the Content of that Paragraph

Read each paragraph to ensure that the topic sentence introduces what is in the paragraph, and to determine whether, perhaps, the material should be divided into two paragraphs, or combined with another paragraph.

3g. Check All Mentions of Important Concepts/Distinctions/Terms

Identify the most important concepts/types/distinctions that you employ, and do a word search for the terms that identify them using the “find” or “search” word processing function. Is your usage consistent? As appropriate, do you define key terms and then stick to those definitions? If you are using acronyms, do you introduce them at the first mention of the name or term, and do you use them consistently thereafter? If you have maintained a formal or informal glossary, check your text against it to ensure consistency.

4. Engage the Reader with a Strong Opening Paragraph

The first paragraph in a paper or article should forcefully pose the question or dilemma that motivates the analysis. This paragraph can resemble the narrative hook noted above, that routinely begins a feature story in journalism. But typically in political science, this paragraph is more rigorously linked to the actual argument of the paper. The following are examples of opening paragraphs that have been used, or could be used, in different types of papers/articles.

Some Examples:

4a. Presenting an Outcome to Be Explained (Dependent Variable)

Explaining China's Market Reforms
Many scholars attribute China's market reforms and the remarkable economic performance they have fostered in part to the country's political and fiscal decentralization. Political decentralization is said to have stimulated local policy experiments and restrained predatory central interventions. Fiscal decentralization is thought to have motivated local officials to promote development and harden enterprises' budget constraints. The locally diversified structure of the pre-reform economy is said to have facilitated liberalization. Reexamining these arguments, the authors find that none establishes a convincing link between political or fiscal decentralization and China's successes. They suggest an alternative view of the reform process in which growth-enhancing policies emerged from competition between pro-market and conservative factions in Beijing.[3]

Explaining the Granting of Rights for Aliens
Why would democracies extend to aliens a right they historically have reserved for citizens—the right to vote? Some scholars argue that transnational movements and global norms increasingly moderate how states treat their aliens. If so, this is important evidence of a change in the meaning and content of sovereignty. This article investigates whether democratic states enfranchise their aliens in response to international, transnational, or domestic factors. While the article finds little support for transnational or systemic arguments, it also finds that political parties and judiciaries affect opportunities for aliens in ways the existing scholarship fails to explain. These findings suggest that both comparative and IR scholarship need to revisit their explanations for contemporary citizenship politics in democracies.[4]

4b. Presenting a Potential Explanation (Independent Variable)

Consequences of Market-Based Reform in India
What do the processes of market-based economic reform and globalization mean for democracy in India? Do they narrow or broaden the democratic prospect? Do they make democracy more or less secure? So far, fortunately, the answers to these questions appeal to be

[3] Hongbin Cai and Daniel Treisman, "Did Government Decentralization Cause China's Economic Miracle?" in *World Politics*, Vol. 58, No. 4, July 2006, 505-535.
[4] David Earnest, "Neither Citizen Nor Stranger: Why States Enfranchise Resident Aliens," in *World Politics*, Vol. 58, No. 2, January 2006, 242-273.

positive. While Indian democracy possesses strong stabilizing features of its own, economic change and liberalization have served to reinforce and further stabilize democracy rather than undermine it, as some have feared would be the case.[5]

4c. Motivating the Analysis by Posing a Dilemma

Health and Welfare in Berkeley

The City of Berkeley is strongly committed to protecting the health and welfare of its residents. Yet this strong commitment poses a dilemma, given that this policy can attract many additional residents to the city, substantially increasing the cost of meeting this policy goal of protecting health and welfare. A dilemma of this type is called a "moral hazard." This article briefly examines the overall idea of a moral hazard. It then reviews evidence on the scope of Berkeley's health and welfare policies compared with other cities of equivalent size. The article also examines fragmentary data on the impact of these policies on migration to Berkeley from other areas. The analysis concludes with suggestions about the specific types of policies that could effectively protect current residents of the city, without necessarily attracting additional residents.

4d. Concept Analysis

Genocide

What is a genocide? This question is as essential for comparative analysis as it is difficult to answer. To investigate common causes among similar cases—a presumptive goal of comparison—researchers must decide what cases belong together. However, despite an abundance of excellent scholarship on definitions, genocide remains a deeply contested concept. Scholars are more likely to disagree than to agree about genocide's core attributes and, by extension, about a universe of genocide cases. While disagreement is healthy, profound conceptual differences limit the theoretical scope of cross-regional and cross-historical study. If developing explanations through comparison is indeed the research goal, conceptual analysis of genocide remains an imperative.[6]

Rape

Because "rape" has such a powerful appraisive meaning, how one defines the term has normative significance. Those who define rape rigidly so as to exclude contemporary feminist understandings are therefore seeking to silence some moral perspectives "by definition." I argue that understanding rape as an essentially contested concept allows the concept sufficient flexibility to permit open moral discourse, while at the same time preserving a core meaning that can frame the discourse.[7]

---

[5] Aseema Sinha, "India's Unlikely Democracy: Economic Growth and Political Accommodation," in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8, No. 2, April 2007, 41-54.

[6] Scott Straus, "Contested Meanings and Conflicting Imperatives: A Conceptual Analysis of Genocide" in *Journal of Genocide Research* (2001), 3(3), 349-375.

[7] Eric Reitan, "Rape as an Essentially Contested Concept" in *Hypatia*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (spring 2001), 43-66.

5. General Suggestions about Presentation, Writing, and Editing

Bibliography. Many students use the "author-date" style of citation, based on parenthetical references in the text, e.g., "(Haas 1990: 15)". Note that the author's name and the year of publication are *not* separated by a comma. If you employ this citation style, be sure that the bibliography is in a consistent format, presenting the name of the author, the publication year, title, relevant page numbers, and other publication facts, as appropriate. Articles in the *American Political Science Review* and the journal *Comparative Political Studies* are a useful model for this form of bibliography. The more traditional style of citation, in which the full citation is contained in each footnote, does not require a bibliography. The two major drawbacks of this latter approach are first, that without the bibliography, it is harder for the reader to see what sources you have used, and second, if you change the order of the footnotes, the references must change, because for the second citation of a given source only a partial reference is provided.

Citations. As just noted, a common format for in-text citations is "(Bendix 1964: 21)". If more than one work is cited, the citations are separated by a semicolon, e.g., "(Bendix 1964; Jowitt 1992)". With the traditional form of footnotes noted in the prior paragraph, various styles are used—you might look at published sources you are using to get ideas for appropriate models.

Citations, page numbers in. See "Page numbers in citations."

Cross-referencing within your own text. Avoid excessive cross-referencing to earlier or subsequent parts of your own text. In any written document, the different parts are expected to be interconnected. Hence, references like "as noted above" and "as will be discussed below" are often unnecessary.

Date your paper or chapters. Put a date at the top of the first page. With multiple drafts of a paper or chapter, it is easy to get them mixed up if you do not. Computer software generally provides an automatic date, and you can type "Printed: [automatic date]" at the top of the first page so that, if you forget to change the date, you will at least know when you printed it.

Dissertation or thesis. When you are writing your dissertation proposal and your dissertation, refer to "this study" or "this research." Calling it a "dissertation" or a "thesis" implicitly places you in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the larger research community. Further, when you later revise your dissertation or thesis for publication in articles or as a book, you will have to change it anyway. Make that change at the start!

False cognates. Many graduate students do dissertation research abroad in a foreign language. When they return to write up their dissertations, it is common for false cognates to appear in their writing. A good example from Spanish would be writing "recuperation" (Spanish: recuperación) instead of the English word "recovery." They may also occasionally use grammatical constructions more characteristic of the language in which they conducted their research. On one level, this is a welcome development, in that it shows the student became truly immersed in the other language. However, it can lead to poor writing in English. A simple solution is to make a list of false cognates that are likely to come up in writing the dissertation. Since the student may eventually publish in the alternative language, such a list can also be an aid in avoiding mistakes

in that language.

Footnotes. Always use footnotes at the bottom of the page, rather than endnotes at the end of the paper or chapter, *unless* you are preparing the final draft for a publisher who requires endnotes. Footnotes facilitate checking your own work, and they are easier for the reader to follow. When you prepare footnotes, be aware that word-processing programs give you the option of using a superscript number with your footnotes (i.e., not just in the text, but in the footnote itself). If you use a superscript in the footnote, it should *not* be followed by a period.

Footnotes as an editing tool. When you delete material from the text, it can be convenient to place some or all of it in a footnote until you decide if you really wish to eliminate it. Subsequently, when you reread the paper, if the material is right at the bottom of the page, it is much easier to double check whether the deletion is a good idea.

Foreign words. An author's *mot juste* may be a source of utter incomprehension for many readers. (If you did not understand the prior sentence, then you get the idea.) The use of foreign words can easily lead to poor communication, and it can also appear pretentious. Usually, one should stick to English.

Literature review. Avoid saying (or thinking) that you are writing a "literature review," especially in Chapter 1 of a doctoral dissertation. You may review *arguments* in the literature that are relevant to your own study, but "literature review" connotes a mere description of the literature, which is not the idea you want to convey.

Long words. Avoid using a long word when a short one will do, and avoid longer forms of a given word. In enumerations, use "second" rather than "secondly" and "third" rather than "thirdly." Also, use "among" rather than "amongst," "toward" rather than "towards," and (at least much of the time) "in" rather than "within."

Long sentences. Avoid long sentences that are hard to follow because. Avoid strings of relatively long sentences. It can be valuable to alternate between long and short sentences. A marvelous quote from *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White (2000: 23) provides an example of such alternation. Under the heading **"Omit Needless Words,"** they state:

> Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all their sentences short, or that they avoid all detail and treat their subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

Here is another example from the classic American novel, *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville.

> Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world.

Omit needless words. Always cut non-essential words (see prior entry).

Page numbers in citations. References to a book or article should include a specific page reference, unless the intent is to refer to the work in a generic way. Good scholarly communication requires that you provide the exact page or pages from which a specific idea or argument is drawn.

Quotations. When an author has particularly well expressed an idea that is important to your analysis, you may feel a strong temptation to insert in your text a substantial block quote to convey this insight to your reader. Most of the time, it is better to paraphrase this author or to quote only a phrase. Readers frequently skip large block quotes, and such quotes can be seen as reflecting an undesirable intellectual dependence on other authors. For some purposes, extensive quotes are essential, but generally they are unnecessary. As a rule, keep quotes short, or omit them.

Shortening a text. Most publishers and funding agencies set strict page limits for proposals and other texts. If you must shorten a text or grant proposal by a moderate amount, one approach is to locate all of the paragraphs in which the text spills onto the last line of the paragraph by only a couple of words, and find a way of trimming a few words out of those paragraphs so that they shorten by one line. If you can do this with 10 paragraphs, you will shave 10 lines from your text.

Time references. Avoid time references that will soon be dated. In writing about a rapidly changing situation, it is often better to use the past tense, since by the time anyone reads what you have written it will refer to something that occurred in the past. It is often better to avoid the present perfect tense for the same reason. Also, rather than using the phrase “during the past 20 years,” which will force the reader to double check the date of publication to understand the time reference, you should say “from the late 1970s to the late 1990s.” Similarly, instead of saying “as of the year of my field research,” just give the date instead.

Using (1, 2,…) or (a, b,…) to break up a long sentence that has compound elements. For example:

> The shift in industrial policy in Mexico has been accompanied by: (1) a decentralization of the entire political system, with state governments now playing a far more independent and complex role vis-à-vis the national government; and (2) a drastic change in the national and subnational configuration of the political power, in that the political party associated with the main labor central lost considerable ground in the context of democratization.

6. Further Suggestions about Style, Usage, and Formatting

Abbreviations. Common mistakes in the use of periods in abbreviations are “et. al.” (wrong) instead of “et al.”; “ie.” (wrong) instead of “i.e.”; and “eg.” (wrong) instead of “e.g.” “I.e.” is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase *id est*, which means “that is.” “E.g.” is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase *exempli gratia*, which means "for the sake of example.” Use “i.e.” to paraphrase and “e.g.” before providing one or more examples.

Awkward (K). The editing symbol "K", meaning "awkward," is handy for commenting on the writing of others. See also "Word choice."

Between vs. among. A good norm is to speak of a relationship *between* two individuals or things, and use *among* to refer to the relationship between three or more.

Capitalization. In English, adjectives derived from proper names are capitalized, e.g., "Marxist theory." Capitals may also be used to indicate specific parts of a work, such as "Chapter 3 analyzes the decline" (but "the next chapter analyzes the decline") and "as can be seen in Figure 2" (but "as can be seen in the figure").

Commas. If a sentence is read out loud, the intonation that one instinctively adopts is often a good guide to the placement of commas. However, a sentence brimming with commas may be technically correct but difficult to read; use commas judiciously.

Commas in a series of items (the "serial comma"). When a series of items is presented with an "and" before the last item—e.g., "a, b, c, d, and e"—the final comma before the "and" (also known as the "serial comma) is often considered optional. However, in a series containing a compound element —e.g., "a, b, c and d, e, f, g, and h"—the compound element ("c and d") is more readily identifiable if the author employs the serial comma. Hence, using the serial comma may be considered preferable. Strunk and White, Chap. 1, presents additional helpful rules on commas.

Contractions. Do not use contractions in formal writing. Avoid "can't," "don't," and "it's", and use "cannot," "do not," and "it is" instead.

Dashes. Three types of dashes are frequently employed in scholarly writing: the common hyphen (see the entry on hyphens, below), the en dash ("–"), and the em dash ("—"). The en dash is most frequently used to indicate a range, such as a range of pages: "pp. 88–94." Em dashes may take the place of commas or parentheses to bracket—and lend emphasis to—a phrase. Be consistent about whether a space appears before and after the em dash. If you use Microsoft Word, you can insert an en dash by simultaneously pressing the Ctrl and minus-sign keys. An em dash can be inserted using the Ctrl, Alt, and minus-sign keys.

Decades. In formal writing, refer to the "1980s," rather than the "eighties" or the "80s." An apostrophe ("1980's") is incorrect.

Ellipses. In quoted material, if words are omitted, three periods are normally used to indicate that the quote is incomplete. However, if the omitted material includes the end of a sentence (i.e., it includes a period), indicate this by including four periods.

"Etc." Putting "etc." at the end of a list should generally be avoided because additional examples beyond those included in the list will often not be obvious to the reader. The construction "and so on" should be avoided for the same reason. Beginning a list with the words "such as" or "including" indicates that the list is incomplete, and thereby eliminates the need for "etc." or "and so on."

First-person. In general, the first-person voice may be used occasionally, but not frequently, in formal writing. However, do use the first person instead of constructions such as "this author disagrees" when referring to your own views. Thus, "I disagree...."

Foreign words. Words in foreign languages usually appear in italics, as do the titles of foreign-language (as well as English-language) books and periodicals. However, other proper nouns used in conjunction with a foreign language are not underlined or italicized.

Front load your sentences. If your sentence has a main point, plus several subordinate clauses, put the main point up front (unless there is a special rhetorical reason for doing otherwise). Back-heavy sentences are harder to read: "Given that it was already late and they were tired, and given that it really was not a practical initiative in any case, they gave up." Front-loaded sentences are easier to read: "They gave up, given that it was already late and they were tired, and given that it was not a practical initiative in any case.

Gendered pronouns. The issue of using a generic "he" or "she" in formal writing can be resolved in one of four ways. First, to counter the weight of many decades of writing in the social sciences in which the generic human being or the generic researcher was referred to as "he," one can consistently say "she." Second, the writer may employ "s/he" and "her/his" throughout. A third option is to alternate between "she" and "he," although this may occasionally introduce confusion. A final option is to switch the construction to the plural "they." Thus, instead of "the researcher frequently encounters difficulty when s/he attempts," one can say "researchers frequently encounter difficulties when they attempt...." Whichever option you select, use it consistently.

Hyphens. Hyphens are used when a compound term is employed as an adjective (e.g., "the case-study method"), but not when the same expression is used as a noun ("the case study").

Margins. Use one-inch margins. You may be tempted to use narrow margins when facing a tight page limit, but such margins make it difficult for a reader to write comments next to the text.

Numbers. In the body of a text, it is common to write out numbers "one" to "nine," and to use numerals for 10 and above. However, it is appropriate to write "10 million," and if a number begins a sentence, it should be written out.

Page numbers. It is surprising how often papers are turned in without page numbers. They should always be included.

Parentheses. Use parentheses sparingly. They can make your sentences excessively complex. Never put an important idea in parentheses, or an idea to which you will make reference in the following text. Punctuation is placed after the closing parenthesis. Thus, "He advocated a minimal definition of democracy (Di Palma 1990: 28)."

Passive voice. The passive voice can make your writing vague and flat, e.g., "It was done by the committee chair," versus "the committee chair did it." In general, use verb forms that are more lively than "to be" verbs. Consider "Campbell and Ross's study is an excellent example of the

quasi-experimental approach," versus "Campbell and Ross's study exemplifies the quasi-experimental approach." This particular change turns a noun into an active verb, which is not always a good idea (see "Verbs" below). Yet such changes will often make your writing more vivid. If you find it hard to avoid the passive voice, at the very least avoid it in topic sentences. See also "There is" below.

Percent. In the body of a text, always write this word out, rather than using "%."

Prepositions at end of sentences. To state this ironically, "prepositions are a 'part of speech' we should not end a sentence with." Or, as Winston Churchill reportedly once said, sentences ending with a preposition are something "up with which we should not put."

Prepositions. Strings of prepositions make for boring writing, especially when "of" is repeated. For example: "in spite of many occurrences of this example of the problem...." Instead, write: "despite the frequent occurrence of the problem...." A substitution such as "despite" for "in spite of" eliminates two prepositions. Finding a construction that allows for a preposition other than "of" also helps. Thus, "the background of this study of alienation," versus "the background for this study of alienation."

Pronoun referent. Be clear about the referent of pronouns. For example, the word "this" should be followed by the referent noun (e.g., "this process") to avoid confusion. When discussing multiple people, be sure that names (as opposed to pronouns) are repeated often enough to make the meaning clear. If you refer to a given individual repeatedly over a number of paragraphs, reintroduce the name at least at the start of each paragraph, and often one or more times within the paragraph, to provide variety.

Quotation marks around a specialized term or usage. If you introduce a special term or usage, put it in quotes the first time, but do not use quotes subsequently.

Quotations. If the first word of material that you are quoting is at the beginning of a sentence in your text, it may be capitalized even if it is not capitalized in the original text. Thus, you do not need to use the following: "[A]lthough they supported the regime...."

If a word or phrase in quotation marks is followed by a comma or period *in the body of your text*, the comma or period comes *before* the "close quote," even if it is not in the original text that you are quoting. However, if the word or phrase is followed by a colon, semi-colon, or question mark that is not in the original text, this punctuation goes outside of the closing quotation mark.

Restrictive versus non-restrictive modifiers. A restrictive modifier specifies the referent of a noun, whereas a non-restrictive modifier gives further information about a noun, the referent of which is already understood. Traditionally, restrictive modifiers are introduced with "that" and are *not* bracketed by commas, whereas non-restrictive modifiers are introduced with "which" and *are* bracketed by commas.

> **Restrictive:** "The book that is on the table is overdue." (This identifies the book.)
>
> **Non-Restrictive:** "The book, which is on the table, is overdue." (This provides further

information about a book that has already been identified.)

Microsoft Word will mark as errors sentences in which this rule is not followed.

Repetition of words. Avoid awkward repetition of words; for example, "creating the agency created many new problems." However, this norm leads to a dilemma. A careful writer faces the great tension between this basic expectation for good writing—which, at least since the famous *De Copia* of Erasmus (1466–1536), has called for avoiding the awkward repetition of words—and the need to use consistent labels in referring to the basic concepts employed in any study. Ruth Collier and I struggled with this tension in *Shaping the Political Arena*. For example, in the glossary (p. 787), we explain that for the sake of variety we used interchangeably the terms "organized labor movement," "organized labor," "trade union movement," and "union movement." See also "Prepositions."

Short items are often better placed at the start of a list. Longer items at the beginning are more awkward: "Their mistakes included frequently omitting to record the relevant information, inadequate preparation for many of the most critical meetings that were held during that week, and confused presentations." Shorter items at the beginning are easier to follow, and preferable (unless there is a special rhetorical reason for putting the short item last): "Their mistakes included confused presentations, frequently omitting to record the relevant information, and inadequate preparation for many of the most critical meetings that were held during that week."

Spacing after punctuation and between words. It is now standard to use only one space after a period. A great advantage of this practice is that you will never have two consecutive spaces in a manuscript (assuming you are using tabs properly). You can avoid the mistake of having extra spaces between words by using the "find and replace" command to eliminate all instances of two spaces in a row.

Spacing between lines. Papers and chapters normally should be double spaced. This allows more space for a reader to write comments on the text, and it can also help facilitate your own editing.

Spell check. You should either use an automatic spell checker (which underlines unrecognized words in red) or periodically activate the spell checker in your word-processor. Yet keep in mind that this will not catch many types of spelling errors and typos. Careful proofreading is essential. Word processors also include routines for checking grammar (which underlines incorrect grammar in green), but many people find these more frustrating than helpful. However, they may help you catch overly long sentences.

"There is." "There is" and "there are" are weak constructions. Replace them with more interesting, active language. Consider "there are many important issues to address in this study," as opposed to "many important issues arise in this study." See "Passive voice" above.

Track changes. You likely know how to use this tool for editing and exchanging comments. If not, do learn it right away.

Underlining. For headings, use bold type rather than underlining or italics.

Verbs. The conversion of nouns to verbs is a natural part of language change. Yet in some cases this is "jarring" and should be avoided. In the immortal example from the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*, "Verbing words weirds language." More practical examples include "to detail," "to impact," and "to research."

"Very." Repetition of the word "very" can weaken the impact of the word (and your argument), and can "very" often be deleted without "very" serious loss of meaning (a combined declarative sentence and example!). The same idea routinely applies to the word "clearly."

Word choice (WC). The editing symbol "WC" is handy for annotating the questioning word choices in another's work. See also "Awkward."

7. Double-Check, Double-Check, Proofread, Proofread!

After all this effort, it is a terrible mistake not to double-check and proofread a paper carefully. Perhaps the most unfortunate mistake of all is to submit a paper with errors that could have been caught by the Microsoft Word spell-check function. The MSWord grammar function can also be helpful – for example, at the simplest level, it catches sentences that lack a verb and helps with "that versus which" usage. It sometimes helps with commas, though sometimes gives bad advice on commas. Get into the habit of using a good online dictionary. Again, proofread, proofread, proofread!!

8. Books and Articles on Writing

Many useful books and articles on writing are available. A terse, engaging, and inexpensive reference is *The Elements of Style: 50th Anniversary Edition* by William Strunk and E. B. White (Longman, 2008). The definitive (long and expensive!) source on rules for writing style is *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition (University of Chicago Press, 2003). Raymond E. Wolfinger's (a Berkeley political scientist) short essay, "Tips for Writing Papers" (*PS: Political Science and Politics*, March 1993, pp. 87–88), is a helpful statement on writing papers. Additionally, two other sources were prepared primarily for graduate students who are working on doctoral dissertations but are useful for other students as well: Howard S. Becker's *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis* (University of Chicago Press, 1986); and Arthur Stinchcombe, "On Getting Hung Up, and Other Assorted Illnesses," in Stinchcombe, *Stratification and Organization: Selected Papers* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).